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Lewellys F. Barker

Some phases of the mental hygiene movement and
the scope of work of the National committee for
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SOME PHASES
OF
The Mental Hygiene Movement
AND
THE SCOPE OF THE WORK
OF
The National Committee for
Mental Hygiene

BY

LEWELLYS F. BARKER, M. D.

President of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene

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The Chief Objects of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene are:

To work for the protection of the mental health of the public; to help raise the standard of care for those threatened with mental disorder or actually ill; to promote the study of mental disorders in all their forms and relations and to disseminate knowledge concerning their causes, treatment and prevention; to obtain from every source reliable data regarding conditions and methods of dealing with mental disorders; to enlist the aid of the Federal Government so far as may seem desirable; to co-ordinate existing agencies and help organize in each State in the Union an allied but independent Society for Mental Hygiene, similar to the existing Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene.

Inquiries regarding the work and requests for pamphlets issued by the organization should be addressed to Clifford W. Beers, Secretary, The National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Room 1914, No. 50 Union Square, New York City, or to Dr. Thomas W. Salmon, Director of Special Studies.

SOME PHASES OF THE MENTAL HYGIENE MOVEMENT
AND
THE SCOPE OF THE WORK
OF
THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MENTAL HYGIENE*

BY

LEWELLYS F. BARKER, M. D.

President of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene.

It is right that, in an International Congress of Hygiene and Demography, the subject of Mental Hygiene should have especial representation. Though assigned, as a sub-section, to the section on the Hygiene of Infancy and Childhood, thus emphasizing its relations to inheritance on the one hand and to the early environmental period of the individual on the other, it might almost equally well, for other reasons, have been made a sub-division in any one of the main groups of the Congress. Indeed, so important is this sub-division for the welfare of individuals, of families, of communities, of nations, and of the human race in general, and so wide spread its ramifications, that committees on the organization of future Congresses might well consider the establishment of an additional main section, devoted entirely to Mental Hygiene.

By a campaign for mental hygiene is meant a continuous effort directed toward conserving and improving the minds of the people, in other words, a systematic attempt to secure human brains, so naturally endowed and so nurtured, that people will think better, feel better, and act better, than they do now. Such a campaign was not to be expected before the rise of modern medicine. For only with this rise have we come to look upon states of mind as directly related to states of brain, to view insanity as disordered brain-function, and to recognize in imbecility, and in crime, the evidences of brain-defect. The imbecile, the hysterical, the epileptic, the insane, and the criminal, were formerly regarded sometimes as saints or prophets, sometimes as wizards or witches, often as the victims of demoniac possession, on the one hand to be revered or worshipped, or, on the other, to be burned or otherwise tortured. Now, such unfortunates are looked upon as patients with disordered or defective nervous systems, proper subjects of medical care; some of them

*An address delivered as Chairman of the sub-section on Mental Hygiene of the 15th International Congress on Hygiene and Demography, Washington, D. C., September 26, 1912.

are curable; some are incurable, but still educable to social usefulness; a part of them are socially so worthless, harmful or dangerous as to make their exclusion from general society necessary, or desirable. It is but a short step from such a reformation of ideas, to the realization that less marked deviations from normal thought, feeling, or behavior, are also evidences either of brains defective from the start, or made abnormal in function by bad surroundings or by bodily disease. As examples of such marked abnormalities may be mentioned those met with in children who are difficult to educate, in young people arraigned in the Juvenile Courts, in adults, who, inadequate to the strains of life, crowd our hospitals or sanatoria on account of "nervous" or "mental" breakdown, or who, owing to anomalies of character and conduct, provide material for the news columns of the sensational press. Modern medicine has taught us to recognize that the conditions necessary for a good mind include, first, the inheritance of such germ-plasm from one's progenitors as will yield a brain capable of a high grade of development to individual and social usefulness, and, secondly, the protection of that brain from injury and the submission of it to influences favorable to the development of its powers. Now if these doctrines of modern medicine be true, the general problems of mental hygiene become obvious; broadly conceived, they consist, first, in providing for the birth of children endowed with good brains, denying, as far as possible, the privilege of parenthood to the manifestly unfit who are almost certain to transmit bad nervous systems to their offspring—that is to say, the problem of eugenics; and second, in supplying all individuals, from the moment of fusion of the parental germ-cells onward, and whether ancestrally well-begun or not, with the environment best suited for the welfare of their mentality.

The natural sciences are built up by the gradual discovery of causal relationships; and physicians and psychologists have, since the time of Pinel, gone far in the establishment of the laws underlying normal and abnormal phenomena of mind. From the conviction that a proper application of the facts already discovered can vastly improve the mental powers of our people, decreasing to a large extent the prevalence of mental defect and mental disease, has come the impulse to arouse public opinion in favor of a definite plan for mental hygiene. This impulse, thanks to the initiative of a layman, Clifford W. Beers, author of "A Mind That Found Itself"*

*An autobiography, published by Longmans, Green & Co., 440 Fourth Avenue, New York.

(now Secretary of the National Committee), whose personal sufferings led him, on recovery, to devote himself to the cause of mental hygiene, and who enlisted the co-operation of a group of representative men and social workers, has found expression in the voluntary formation of a National Committee for Mental Hygiene.* The policy to be pursued by the Committee has been formulated largely as a result of the deliberations of the first Chairman of the Executive Committee in consultation with other distinguished psychiatrists and social workers.

Among its objects may be emphasized (1) the protection of the mental health of the public at large; (2) the promotion of the study of mental disorders in all their forms and relations, and the dissemination of knowledge concerning their causes, treatment and prevention; and (3) the amelioration of conditions among those already suffering from mental disorder.

The Committee on Program has asked me to describe briefly the scope of the work of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene.

As I see it, there are three great fields in which the National Committee may advantageously labor.

First, there is the field of *original inquiry* regarding the problems of mental hygiene. A National Committee, adequately endowed could support and direct the investigation of special questions by experts, thus adding to the knowledge which can be applied in the more practical part of the campaign. This work of research is very costly; were they available, immense sums could be used for studying the influences of heredity and of external circumstances upon the structure and functions of the human nervous system; meanwhile, a National Committee, composed of leaders of thought among the men and women of the country can do much to favor such studies by university departments, by existing institutes of research, and by other agencies already organized.

The second field includes the great work of *educating the nation* to use the knowledge which scientific investigators have already put at our disposal. In this field three powerful enemies oppose

* This Committee was founded at a meeting held in New York City, February 19, 1909, when the following officers were appointed for the first year: President, Dr. Henry B. Favill; Vice-Presidents, Dr. Charles P. Bancroft and Dr. William H. Welch; Executive Committee, Dr. Adolf Meyer (Chairman), Dr. C. P. Bancroft, Professor Russell H. Chittenden, Professor William James and Miss Julia C. Lathrop. The Chairman of the Executive Committee, at present, is Dr. George Blumer, Dean of Yale Medical School.

us—ignorance, apathy, and prejudice. These hostile forces, we must overcome. They will retreat, as they always do, before the attack of men and women armed with accurate knowledge of facts and energized by the emotions which accompany visions of remediable evil.

In this campaign of education, the general public, physicians, school-teachers, the clergy, members of the legal profession, our legislators—all must be taught the particular truths regarding mental hygiene which each group, respectively, can best apply.

Only a minority of the public know and realize that the kind of mind an individual has depends upon the inborn qualities of brain he inherits and the influences which act upon it afterwards; that not only imbecility, insanity, and epilepsy are due to disordered or defective nervous systems, but that further, inebriety, prostitution, vagrancy, pauperism and crime have the same origin, as do also ineducability, laziness, and other forms of mental disability. Not many know that 40 to 50% of all severer cases of mental disorder are due to known and well defined causes, preventable by means with which we are now acquainted; that 25% of the patients admitted to institutions for the insane, and a large proportion of the criminals in confinement have brains that have been injured by the abuse of alcohol; and that all general paresis, and much mental disorder of other sorts, has been preceded by syphilitic infection, usually insufficiently treated. Only a few are aware that there are already about 250,000 insane people in the United States to-day, and that the number is increasing at the rate of three or four per every thousand of increase of population. Not enough people realize that, if two imbeciles marry, all their children will be imbecile; or that when imbeciles marry normal persons, about half the total offspring are feeble-minded or degenerate. Nor, as yet has it been possible to impress the public with the facts that the social stigmatizing of the insane is cruel and unreasonable; that suicide, occurring as a result of a psychopathic constitution, should excite the sympathy rather than the moral judgment of those who think humanely; that early treatment of insanity in suitable institutions leads to complete recovery in at least 25% of the cases; or with a thousand other facts that ought to be known and realized.

How are the important data regarding the protection of the mental health of the public to be made available to them? This

is one of the problems to be solved. Much can doubtless be done through the dissemination of suitable books and pamphlets, through sensible articles in magazines and newspapers, through public lectures, through "mental hygiene exhibits" (such as the admirable one prepared under the direction of Dr. Stewart Paton, for the National Committee for Mental Hygiene to present at this Congress), through teaching in the schools, churches, and social clubs, most of all, however, through the advice of family physicians, who more than others have opportunity to be practically effective in giving wise counsel.

This brings me to the education of physicians. The instruction in psychiatry in our medical schools is sadly deficient. Though in Germany, each university has for many years had its psychiatric clinic, it was not until recently that a single medical school in this country had a well equipped clinic of this sort. Now the outlook is better. At Ann Arbor, medical students of the University of Michigan have for several years had the privileges of a small clinic conducted along the newer lines. At Boston, the new State Psychopathic Hospital will be available for educating students regarding the manifestations of mental disease. And, lately, at the cost of over one million dollars given by Henry Phipps, a model Psychiatric Clinic has been erected in connection with the Johns Hopkins Hospital and University and its maintenance guaranteed for the coming decade. It cannot be long now before every medical school of the first class will have its own psychiatric clinic. The teaching in these clinics will undoubtedly lead to great reforms in the treatment, and in the prevention of mental diseases. The National Committee for Mental Hygiene may be of service in hastening the advent of such psychiatric clinics. It intends to keep on file all needed information regarding them, as well as plans of model clinics, sanatoria, hospitals, etc., which will be accessible to institutions, or to community officials, who may desire to consult them.

When physicians are better trained in psychiatry, they will be even more helpful than now in counselling regarding the marriage of people with psychopathic tendencies, concerning the hygiene of pregnancy, of birth, of childhood, of puberty and of the climacteric period, in relation to the education of backward or of peculiar children, and with reference to dietetic, sexual and occupational hygiene. They will also learn to recognize mental disorders earlier than now, that is, at a stage where many of them are curable,

and will do much toward overcoming the prejudices of the people against referring the more serious cases to expert care in suitable institutions.

The teachers in our schools and colleges should gladly join in a campaign for mental hygiene, and they, themselves, will welcome instruction which will help them in their pedagogic problems. For teachers have been among the first to notice among children great differences in degree of educability by ordinary methods. Until the reasons were made clear, some teachers unjustly blamed children slow to learn; other teachers, discouraged, unjustly blamed themselves. Here, scientific medicine has come to the aid of pedagogy. School physicians are becoming more expert in distinguishing between inborn and acquired defect, between remediable and irremediable difficulty. The establishment of special classes and of special schools, for "feebly endowed," "backward," and "exceptional" children is removing a great burden from the schools and the teachers. Special opportunities are being created and new methods are being devised through which such children can be favorably influenced.

As to the need of education of the representatives of the law—lawyers, magistrates, judges, and legislators—anyone who has studied the psychology of criminals and who is at the same time familiar with our laws and our courts can attest. Since psychiatrists have had the opportunity thoroughly to observe and study criminals before, during and after punishment, our notions of the relations between crime and mental disorder (or anomaly), have been greatly changed. There is a growing tendency to recognize the dependence of criminal, as well as of all other, acts upon the mental state of the agent, and of the latter, in turn, upon the functions of his bodily organs. The newer knowledge demands a revision of the old problems of responsibility, of testamentary capacity, and of the nature and purpose of punishment. Above all, the new insight into facts can be valued for opposing and preventing crime. For since we no longer believe that every man, at every moment, is entirely free to act, or not, in a given way, but have come to realize that the behavior of a given moment may be a matter of necessity, we have begun to see that to prevent criminality, we must bring influences to bear—social, economic, or medical—that will modify the mental factors driving individuals to anti-social acts. It will be a great step forward when all

offenders brought before the Juvenile Court shall, after skilled psychiatric examination, be assigned to environments that will do most to educate them to social usefulness. Criminals, young or old, incapable of education to social value, society will learn permanently to exclude. That the scandal which has pertained to "expert" medical testimony in the Courts must quickly disappear, once a real campaign of mental hygiene has made headway, goes without saying. And, that in the revision of our law codes, particularly of its criminal code, specialists in psychiatry should co-operate with the best legal talent, would seem obvious. Toward the spread of these ideas, a National Committee for Mental Hygiene should be able to do much.

Indispensable for accomplishment in two fields already mentioned—those of investigation and of education—is activity in a third great field, that of *organizing the agencies* by which the campaign is to be carried on. The bulk of the work must be done by individuals, and by local and State societies. An excellent beginning has been made by the State Societies for Mental Hygiene organized in Connecticut and in Illinois, and by the Committee on Mental Hygiene of the State Charities Aid Association of New York. To encourage the work of such societies, to stimulate the foundation of similar agencies in every state of the Union, and to co-ordinate and to give impetus to the work of the campaign throughout the whole country, will be among the principal functions of the National Committee. And while correlating the work of such agencies, the National Committee will make every effort to co-operate with other National and International Associations with allied philanthropic aims—eugenic, euthenic, pedagogic, sociologic, legislative. It will, of course, join in the general warfare against poverty and all the forms of social injustice which tend to unhinge the mind.

If the National Committee for Mental Hygiene is successful in making of itself a strong central agency devoted to the objects mentioned, it will serve a function of fundamental importance to the whole American people. For if local communities remain backward in mental hygiene, they must sooner or later injure more advanced distant communities. By keeping all the States informed of the plans of work adopted where progress is making fastest, advances can be made more rapidly, more uniformly and more economically than would be otherwise possible. A representative

National Committee should be able to secure that nation-wide attention to the problems which is necessary for any steady advance toward those higher ideals of mental hygiene which we cherish. It is conceivable that Congress may be induced to supplement private funds in support of a movement of such national significance. It would be a good policy. Like many other forward movements in this republic, however, the larger movement for mental hygiene must be initiated and be voluntarily supported by those who see the need and the opportunity, long before the consciousness of the masses is aware of them.

To carry out its plan, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene will require large amounts of money. It would be hard to think of any project, likely to yield larger returns, even in a material way, on money invested in it. The care of the insane of the nation together with the economic loss incurred through incapacity and death were estimated by Dr. C. L. Dana* in 1904 to be about 85 millions of dollars per year. It is said to amount now to much more than 100,000,000 dollars per year. If we add to this the expense borne by society because of the feeble or abnormal minds of criminals, inebriates, paupers and social parasites generally, we see what enormous sums could annually be saved by applying methods which will prevent mental anomaly and defect, or which will restore working capacity and economic independence to those suffering from mental disorders.

It is hoped that the various phases of these problems will appeal to patriotic citizens who are well-to-do, and who are willing to give of their surplus to better the minds of our people. To some philanthropists, the endowment of original investigation will most appeal; to others, the support of educative measures; to still others, the defraying of the expenses of the work of organization. One gentleman, well-known for his devotion to the public welfare, has offered to give \$50,000 toward an Endowment Fund as soon as \$200,000 has been given by others for the purpose mentioned, and the same philanthropist has already contributed \$50,000 to the National Committee for immediate use in "helping to ameliorate conditions among the insane." This gift has made possible the work of the "Special Sub-Committee on the Survey and Improvement of Conditions among the Insane," of which Dr. William L. Russell is Chairman,

* See Dr. Dana's address before the Congress of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis, 1904.

and Dr. Thomas W. Salmon, of the U. S. Public Health Service, who has been granted leave of absence for the purpose, is the Director of the Special Studies now being made.

The work of ameliorating the conditions of the insane is very important and the National Committee rejoices in a gift that permits a beginning in that direction. But its members hope that, before very long, large gifts may become available, also, for the very important matter of prevention. Sums of any size will be welcomed by the treasurer of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Otto T. Bannard, President of the New York Trust Company, or by the Chairman of the Finance Committee, Professor Russell H. Chittenden, Director of the Sheffield Scientific School, New Haven, Connecticut.

The task which the National Committee for Mental Hygiene has set itself, is an enormous one. It hopes by investigation, by education, and by organization steadily to improve the brain-power of the nation. It is striving to hasten the time when our people will be so begot, and so reared, that their minds will develop normally and harmoniously; when society will have less need than now for sanatoria, asylums, and prisons; and when all but an irreducible minority of those born to membership in the nation may think, feel, and act in a way that will make them desirable citizens of that Better State which is our goal.

It is a great task, but surely not too great for the country that produced George Washington, and John Marshall, and Abraham Lincoln, or for the parents of a people to whom belong Benjamin Franklin, and Willard Gibbs, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Publications

of

The National Committee for Mental Hygiene

Sent upon application free, or for the price indicated below.

No. 1. Origin, Objects and Plans of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene.

No. 2. Principles of Mental Hygiene applied to the Management of Children predisposed to Nervousness.—By Dr. Lewellys F. Barker, Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University. (Issued March, 1912.)

No. 3. Summaries of the Laws relating to the Commitment and Care of the Insane in the United States. Compiled by Mr. John Koren. Price, One Dollar, postpaid. (Issued September, 1912.)

No. 4. Some Phases of the Mental Hygiene Movement and the Scope of the Work of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene.—By Dr. Lewellys F. Barker, Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University. An address delivered as Chairman of the sub-section on Mental Hygiene at the 15th International Congress on Hygiene and Demography, Washington, D. C., September 26, 1912. (Issued November, 1912.)

Requests and orders for pamphlets and reports should be addressed to Clifford W. Beers, Secretary, No. 50 Union Square, New York City.

The National Committee for Mental Hygiene also distributes reports and pamphlets issued by the Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene, the Illinois Society for Mental Hygiene, and the Committee on Mental Hygiene of the State Charities Aid Association of New York.

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